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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated anxiety among the Palestinian children in the West Bank under the Israeli occupation since 1967. The violence has been both physical and verbal and has taken different forms: trial, shooting, home raids and torture. In comparison with studies that have shown that a very small percentage of people develop fear or psychic disturbances as a result of passive or active participation in violent events, it was found in this study that some Palestinian children have actually developed in themselves a certain psychic immunity that makes it possible for them to continue normal daily life with a healthy regularity. They have grown up stronger, and more life-affirming than before the intifada. It was found that these youths received support and encouragement from parents and other family members. (Author/BF)

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Anxiety and Its Influence on the Political Views of Palestinian Youngsters

RASMIYAH HANOUN

This paper investigated anxiety among the Palestinian children in the West Bank, under the Israeli occupation, and as a result of the occupation ruthless and repressive policy. In comparison with studies that have shown that a very small percentage of people develop fear or psychic disturbances as a result of passive or active participation in violent events, it was found in this study that Palestinian children have developed in themselves a certain psychic immunity that made it possible to continue normal daily life a health regularity. They functioned better psychologically than before in terms of social problematic issue in their life.

PROBLEM OF STUDY

Palestinian children have only known the violence of the Israeli occupation since 1967. This violence has been both physical and verbal and has taken different forms: trial, shooting, home raids and torture. All this has caused anxiety among children. But there were levels of anxiety depending on the environment of the Palestinian child: those living in refugee camps, villages, cities. The camp refugees' children were the brunt of confrontations. As a result these children have developed higher degree of anxiety. Their anxiety has increased since the beginning of the intifada taking into consideration that Palestinian children have their domestic anxiety and experiences that magnified fear or pain in civilian life - a dog bite for example. Both sources of anxiety left their toll on the life of Palestinian child politically, socially, psychologically and educationally. In other words their political views or attitudes were colored by their experiences with the Israeli soldiers.

This study attempts to address and find answers to the following questions:

1. Has the intifada, a war in itself, influenced the Palestinian children greater than before the intifada in terms of anxiety?
2. Has their anxiety influenced their political views?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Gaza the Mental Health Program conducted several studies about psychological health of Palestinians, the impact of current events and violence to which they are subjected.

One study dwelt on violence and its effect on the Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip. The study was done on a sample of 2,779 children between the age of 7-15. The purpose of the study was to identify the kind of violent stimuli and confrontations to which the children had been exposed to and which influences their mental and psychological health. It was found that some 45% of children had their bones broken. Some 85% of children's homes were raided in the night by Israeli soldiers. These raids resulted in the arrests of 15% of children's fathers; 32% of child's siblings - brother. About 21%

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got injured.

The researchers also found a higher degree of anxiety in general among children. This has been translated into fear of darkness, disturbing dreams (nightmares); fear of soldiers, fear of loneliness, feeling of tension and nervousness, loss and weakness in concentrations, bed wetting, spread of physical ailments that had no medical explanation. The children also witnessed so many cases of violence which has been distinctive to their psychological life. Children who had witnessed a family member being subjected to violence had a higher degree of anxiety and a lower appreciation of self than the children who had been subjected personally to violence. Children, subjected to violence, had activism and positive behavior compared to those who had witnessed violence against a family member. In a study day about education in early childhood, psychologist Nabilah Spaniole revealed a clear discrimination between Arab and Jewish children in allocation of funds and their distribution. According to Spaniole, some 50% of Arab children aged 5 could get involved in an educational facility compared to 98% in the Jewish sectors. Only 25% of three-year-old Arab children could get a form of education. It was also found that 73% of coeducational programs were held in wealthy areas as opposed to 10% in the poor areas.

On the other hand, it was found that more 23% of Israeli families lived below the poverty line. In the Arab sector, some 67% of Arab children lived below the poverty line. Some 59% of them are considered poor even after receiving their national security insurance as opposed to only 10% among the Jewish children. It was also revealed that some 10,000 in the Arab sector, between the ages (6-13), dropped out of school. The rate of school leaving in the Arab sector schools topped 35% as opposed to 10% in the Jewish sector. The crime rate among Arab adults amounted to 5 per one thousand while in the Jewish sector the average was 3.3.[1]

This study was based on interviews Palestinian children (9-12) living in villages and refugee camps. Another primary source was my observation and experiences for a considerable period of time. The children belonged to lower socioeconomic class and middle social class. Interviews were conducted both males and females. The data were collected from the subjects' writings, games, drawings, dreams, songs, and behavior.
The hypothesis is that the subjects of the study would show a higher degree of anxiety, especially in the camps, in comparison to their anxiety before the intifada. And that this would harden their political views.

RESULTS

It was found that there were significant differences in degree of anxiety between villages and refugee camp children. Some children had greater anxiety before the intifada. After the intifada, they had less anxiety due to their positive environment and adaptations (Es-Sarraj, 1990). Some of them are now

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[1] ni nerdlihC hsiweJ dna barA neewteb noitanimircsiD suoivbO" .4:3991 ,51 yaM sduQ-lA "learsI

in a better state of mind. They have been buffeted by the intifada and its effects and have grown up stronger, whole and life-affirming, while others have been deeply and lastingly scared. Some have been able to transcend traumas of the intifada and the conflict. They began identifying themselves with their political cause morally, physically and emotionally. Their preoccupation in the intifada resulted in expressing their fears but also hopes.

The anxiety has highly politicized the children in terms of their participation in the events. Palestinian children have witnessed the beating, arresting, killing of their parents, siblings and neighbors. They were been terrified by the night raids of the soldiers. These personal experiences have left long lasting effects on the children. However, other children who actively involved in the events, have developed affirmative and positive reaction to stress although they have hidden anxiety. Their involvement and active participation made a major contribution to their adjustment. Parents who showed phobias in front of soldiers, in presence of their children, left negative impact on them. These parents were also found that they never allowed their children to take a role in confrontations soldiers. Therefore, their children were victims of their parents' failure to let them grow up independently. Their children were captives to their fears and anxiety.

The anxiety among Palestinian children and its increase is attributed to "the feelings of frustration and helplessness" (Quta and El-Sarrah, 1992). The feeling of anxiety was expressed in terms of release of tensions outwardly by burning a tire, throwing a stone, or writing on the walls.

In short, anxiety stemmed from within the children's environment - home and from without - the occupation.

The level of anxiety among male and female children in Gaza was 22% and 37% respectively (El-Sarraj). The females were found to be suffering from a high degree of severe anxiety. The parents' anxiety was obviously transmitted to their children. There was a higher incidence of behavioral problems (A. Baker, 1988).

Because of respected subjection to Israeli physical and verbal violence, the Palestinian children were forced to be more active and more extreme in their political views. This Israeli policy helped the Palestinian children become politically conscious of the conflict.

Palestinian youths, for more than 25 years, have been brought up on daily images of soldiers, chasing and beating them or firing at them or shooting tear gas canisters, let alone arresting them. For more than two decades, young Palestinians have been locked in a life-and-death struggle with the occupying army that has denied them any essential part of a normal, carefree childhood. The daily practices of Israeli soldiers have made Palestinian youths too aggressive. The ruthless practices have created anxiety among these youths. This anxiety, originated by the military occupation, is so dominant that the most - repeated words in the Palestinian youths' vocabulary have to do with struggle such as hajar (stone), shabab (youths) mulathameen (masked activists), jaish. Psychological fears among Palestinian youths include bed-wetting in the night after witnessing violent confrontations between soldiers and them: games in which the occupation and its practices have become a constant part of their life. While youths of their age in other countries celebrate holidays, playing in parks and trying new computer games, Palestinian youths play on streets intifada games.

To understand Palestinian youths' anxiety and its influence on their political views, one needs a few primary sources, first hand information and tools: a questionnaire targeted at Palestinian youths, observation of these youths' behavior while playing on streets, at schools, at home. One has also to

study their dreams, their writings, paintings, games, songs and their violent clashes with the occupation soldiers. This study profiles Palestinian youth's anxiety, resulted from soldiers from the occupation, and its influence on forming their political stance through various ways of expression: writing, painting, games, songs, dress and their confrontation with heavily armed soldiers.

PAINTINGS

As a result of the violent reality and hostile environment, Palestinian youths have expressed their anxiety by drawing their visions. In their drawings, Palestinian youths conveyed their political views about what was happening around them. Every drawing was a political statement directed towards his environment. To move from general to specific, in June 1991, an exhibition of the children's artwork was held at the Palestinian Cultural Center in Jerusalem. Hundreds of paintings were exhibited. The intifada was found to be theme of some 90% of the 450 paintings on display. The drawings were done by children of Qalandia Refugee Camp south of Ramallah. The Palestinian flag was portrayed in most paintings held aloft by tiny hands, waving from a tree, rooftops and electricity pylons. Life of Palestinian soldiers, soldiers' jeeps being chased by stone throwers and flags of victory raised on electricity pylons. Another Palestinian youth painted a military bulldozer, Palestinian martyr, a flag and demonstration.

The Palestinian youths from refugee camps were very much preoccupied with political drawings because the camps have felt the brunt of the suppression, violence and frustration. The Palestinian youths' drawing of the Palestinian flag on every work can be explained in terms of achieved and unachieved desires. The Palestinian child draws a flag of his homeland because it is an unachieved desire, and he wants to make it a reality.

Another exhibition of paintings by Palestinian youths was also held in September 1990. It showed some 150 pictures; more than 30 of 150 had taken politics as their theme. Many others showed that politics was not far away from the consciousness of 12-year-olds. The exhibition, like the first, included works by some 60 children aged 7-17. In addition to politics, the paintings dealt with animals life, fairy tales, life and abstract patterns.

A careful study of the paintings revealed and showed that girls tended to be less political. Boys began to show political interest at the age of 12. Of the political paintings, two were directly related to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein against a background of a Palestinian flag; the other showed Iraqi planes strafing a star of David, a more sophisticated political statement. Other pictures showed Palestinians customary symbols intruding elsewhere in some paintings. These show the political maturity of these youths. The theme of little Red Riding Hood was a popular one. One girl drew the scene of Red Riding Hood and the wolf in the forest a large dove flying overhead. Another boy drew the Red Riding Hood screaming while a hunter takes aim at the wolf with the submachine gun. The political implications become more compelling when the same hunter drawn in the same colors with the same gun shows up in another picture, by the boy, firing at a group of Arab demonstrators. There were other less violent and more compelling political pictures: sensitive portraits of painted Palestinian faces. To conclude, when the children were asked why they had drawn political subjects, they responded, "This is the situation we live in."

GAMES

Another outward sign of anxiety that influenced the Palestinian youths' political views were the games played by children on the streets and playgrounds, alleys of the Palestinian villages, cities and refugee camps. Youths would gather in school yards or streets. Since the early days of the intifada, the most popular games have been the "soldiers with their pretend rifles" and the "heroes" their stones. The groups would clash pulling apart and leaving "dead" and "wounded" on the ground. Cries and guttral sounds imitate the crack of the rifles shots and the boom of tear gas bombs. This game, the most popular outward sign of the effects of the confrontation soldiers' and their violence, was played with variation.

Palestinian youths also acted plays which showed their anxiety, frustation and hopelessness about what the occupation is doing to them. One play dwelt on a Palestinian girl crossing the Allenby Bridge from Jordan to the West Bank. An Israeli soldier gives the girl a candy but then he breaks open her doll to see if she is carrying anything "dangerous". The firl acts by throwing the candy back at the soldier.

CONFRONTATIONS

Palestinian youths expressed their political views which started to harden by making daily confrontations with the heavily armed soldiers. These included daubing Palestinian flags, raising it, barricading roads, hurling stones, petrol bombs and hand grenade attacks and damaging property. These were clearly a sign of the radicalization of their political views as a result of two much suppression. The Palestinian youth has become the symbol of the revolution of the rocks. Their confrontations with soldiers have left many of them with long-lasting effects and scars on them in terms of physical and mental problems.

When the 16-year-old Farid was asked why he stoned the Israeli soldiers, he had this to say: "Sooner or later, you will die, so there is nothing to be afraid of. They took our land; they killed our brothers; they arrested my friends. Our life is not so good that we can regret stoning the soldiers." Another outward manifestation of physical resistance is the Palestinian youths' flashing of a V-sign at soldiers or at helicopters as a kind of challenge. In this regard, many a time Israeli soldiers have chased Palestinian youths for flashing V-sign. Imad Khatib, 3, was a case in point. He was chased by an Israeli patrol. His crime was making a V-sign at them. They caught him, who weighed 32 Kg., beat him repeatedly, raised him high in the air, threw him to the ground and kicked him with their with their boots. Witnesses there reported that three of the soldiers took souvenir pictures of this scene - even passing the camera around so that everyone could be in the shot. Another practice was seen when Israeli soldiers used to tie the Palestinian youths to the metal rod of their jeeps' fronts so that soldiers could go through the city or camp or town freely. One could imagine the anxiety and its influence on these youths' political views.

Palestinian youths also flew balloons in the colors of the Palestinian flag forcing the soldiers to fire hundreds of bullets to blow off these balloons. Kites were also made and flown over city, camps to compensate for the lack of real copters to protect them. To convey a political statement, Palestinian youths used to wear T-shirts. It was an addition to the politicos armory. These T-shirts expressed their

sentiments, anger and frustrations, hopes and aspirations. The T-shirts would carry black and white kaffiyeh. Others showed a Palestinian kaffiyeh surrounded by barbed wire. But those spotted wearing T-shirts political or nationalistic connections were subjected to severe punishment.

The Palestinian youths also registered their political views by writing on the walls. As soon as darkness fell, these youths would emerge to scrawl the latest slogans as directed by their leadership. Slogans would express the ideologies of factions in the occupied territories. When soldiers stormed neighborhoods towns, villages and refugee camps, they used to stand over men, and women, youths at gunpoint forcing them to hold their identity cards aloft as they painted out all traces of the political slogans.

Moreover, through the medium of national songs, youths expressed their political views. At wedding parties, at school, on the streets, youths would sing songs like "slings and catapults the flames of revolution will blaze." Some of the popular national songs were taped and became a big business. Youths would play those songs on tape recorders.

Any attempt to soften the political views of Palestinian youths requires an end to their anxiety caused by the occupation. The youth peace camp held in Spain in August 1992 failed to extricate the Palestinian youths of their anxiety. There was tension between Israeli and Palestinian youths attending the peace camp. During a cultural evening, even before the day the political discussions were to begin, the Palestinians, performed a play in which every Palestinian girl told her mother how she had been beaten by an Israeli soldiers.

Considerable percentage of Palestinian youths developed fear or psychic disturbances as a result of passive or active participation in the events of intifada. The influence of the occupied violence on the Palestinian youth was somewhat smaller than experiences that manifest fear or pain, physical or mental, in civilian life - a dog bite for example.

Some Palestinian youths developed in themselves a certain psychic immunity that made it possible for them to continue normal daily life a healthy regularity. In fact they functioned better psychologically than before in terms of their study and social achievement and interaction. When this aspect was investigated, it was found that those youths received support and encouragement from parents and other family members. Parents and elder siblings never showed fear in front of them especially when soldiers broke into their homes. Other youths could not resist anxiety because their family members showed fear in front of the soldiers. This left long-lasting scars on their personality and behavior.

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